

## YOUNG SOLDIER READY FOR DEATH.

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"Therefore be ye also ready; for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of Man cometh." MAT: XX.IV-49.

WERE these words addressed to us by some venerable patriarch, who had himself been permitted to pass the usual boundary of human life, and who had seen generation after generation melt away as morning clouds; who had seen the young and the beautiful sicken and die, the strong man arrested by the last enemy, the aged falter, and go down beneath the blows of the destroyer, they would surely demand the most serious attention. Or if some inhabitant of the land of spirits had been dispatched to warn us how near our careless feet are daily treading to the confines of two worlds, and nearer every day, who would not listen to the kind admonition?

One greater, infinitely more far seeing than either patriarch or prophet, or angel, He who speaks as "never man spake," addresses us in my text, and is ever repeating the warning in his providence. He who from the depths of the eternal past to the dawn of time, and to its last setting sun, and through the everlasting ages of the future, has seen with the eye of omniscience the destiny of the soul, and has estimated its value—He it is who says to us in tones of tender solicitude, "Be ye also ready."

Our own experience too, though young we may be, teaches us the mutability of all earthly things, and among all the uncertain ties of life, that nothing is more uncertain than life itself. However bright the prospect before us, whatever inducements we may have to desire, length of days, however strong the ties that bind us to the relationship of earth, none of them afford exemption from the inexorable decree, "dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return." The places that were yesterday scenes of festivity, are to-day houses of mourning—hopes that now bud with beautiful promises for the future, may to-morrow lie at our feet, withered and crushed as if blasted by fire from heaven. The paths of our pilgrimage at every period in life are whitened with the bones of the dead, and moist with the tears of the living. How appropriate then that we lay to heart the solemn words of inspiration, "be ye also ready;" and how important that we be prepared to endure the scrutiny of the judgment that follows death, and how gravely interesting becomes

*I. The enquiry naturally suggested by the text: What is meant by being prepared for the coming of the Son of Man?*

In this chapter the Saviour describes the destruction of Jerusalem, and the end of the world, and from one to the other the transition is almost imperceptible, so that the two objects seem to be blended together, while they are really perfectly distinct. The coming of the Son of Man refers particularly to the second appearance of Christ upon earth, when he shall descend in power and glory to judge its inhabitants, and to give to each the reward of his deeds, whether good or evil. With us, as with those to whom he spoke, it will not be, I apprehend, to determine the destiny of the soul but to consummate its happiness or its woe, and in the eyes of the assembled universe, to give expression to his approval or condemnation. The question as to which class we may belong, the righteous or the wicked, will have been settled long before the archangel's trumpet shall summon the generations of time to the tribunal of the final day. In Eccl. xxi: 7 it is written, "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it." This evidently is the state of man immediately after death, for preceding the final judgment, and in connection with it, the resurrection of the body shall occur, and that body shall be immortal and die no more. Nor can we suppose that the spirit, which is said to return to God, shall, prepared or unprepared, dwell with him until the revelations of the last day, nor that it is to remain in some intermediate state, neither happy nor miserable, nor yet in a condition preparatory to its future destiny receiving a measure of joy or suffering. The same elements of character which will qualify or disqualify it for the presence of God, and the enjoyment of his love after the judgment exist before it.

But we are not left to the wild fancies of imagination, or the uncertain light of unassisted reason. The scriptures are not silent here. The Saviour assured his disciples, John xiv.-23, "I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." A few years after, the disciples died, their bodies were given to the dust. Are their spirits wanderers and aliens from the mansions of which he told them there were many in his Father's house? In the ecstasy of his dying hour the martyr Stephen said, Acts 7:56: "Behold I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God;" and with the glorious vision before his eyes cried, "Lord Jesus receive my spirit." Did Christ reveal himself to the dying saint but to disappoint him, and to leave his soul in exile to this hour? Paul says, 2 Tim. 4:6: "The time of my departure is at hand." Whither? He tells us in another place, 2 Cor. 5:1: "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands eternal, in the heavens." There is the dwelling for which his spirit longed when he wrote to the Phillippians, 1:23: "having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better." Christ informs us, Luke. 16:22, 23, that the "beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. The rich man also

died and was buried, and in hell he lifted up his eyes being in torment." Their bodies wasted into dust and their spirits went to the places for which they were prepared.

Death then whenever it comes, introduces the soul into that state for which it is fitted. To be ready for that event which must happen alike to all, is to be reconciled to God, to love Jesus as our Saviour, to know the cleansing efficacy of his blood, to bear within us the power of his grace, restraining from sin, and leading to love and holiness and good fruits. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ," Rom. 5.1. The carnal mind is ever striving to find some substitute for the method of reconciliation with God which he has adopted, and announced for the good of mankind, or else the subject is postponed for future consideration. Thus if the claims of the soul are entertained at all, it is not unusual to find a man relying upon his fidelity to the relations and duties of life, his morality, to reach the end for which Christ died, losing sight of the fact that he defies the authority, and discredits the end of God which declares, Acts 4.12, that "there is none other name (than Christ) under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved."

In these days some entertain the wicked delusion that he who dies for his country will be saved by virtue of his patriotism. I respect integrity, and all those traits of character that elevate and ennoble man. I appreciate the patriotism of our noble army of defenders, whose brave bosoms are bared to the storms of battle. Their lofty courage, their unflinching endurance, their gallant deeds, their sacrifice and their perils, endear them to every heart that loves liberty. They deserve the admiration of their race; but what has integrity as between man and man, or love of country, to do with justification before God? What do they accomplish towards the salvation of the soul? Nothing, for they leave their possessor just where they found him, a transgressor against God. A man accused of murder might with as much reason plead that he is not a thief, or if charged with treason, answer to the indictment that he loves his family. Innocence of one crime, is no plea against another which has been perpetrated. Is it not strange and sad that men will stultify themselves upon a subject with regard to which they should be the most candid.

All are offenders against God, "not subject to his law," and under condemnation. Faith alone in him who "was wounded for our transgressions," reconciles to God, a faith that renounces sin and self-righteousness, and embraces Jesus with the whole heart, that lays every gift and grace of mind and body upon the altar of love, and says, "here Lord am I—all that I have is thine," There is but one way to the gates of the celestial city—that which leads beneath the cross. There is but one wedding garment that the Master of the great assembly will recognize—the righteousness of him who "bore our griefs and carried our sorrows," Is. 53.4—but one mark which in all the universe will designate an heir of



heaven—the blood of the Lamb. With them justice will smile upon the “chief of sinners,” without them Paul would be an outcast. Do not flatter yourself that by any act of yours you may win the favor of God, or behold his glory, or taste the bliss of his love. To be ready for the coming of the Son of Man, your conscience must be cleansed from sin, and your guilt atoned for by his blood, and your nature renewed and sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Thus, and thus *only* by repentance, faith, and holiness, can you heed the gracious warning of the text: “Be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh.”

A part of a Christian's life consists in watching—“watch therefore; for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come,” Mat. 24.42; “And what I say unto you, I say unto all—watch,” Mark 13.37. Christians may and often do become languid and drowsy. The wise virgins slumbered while the bridegroom tarried. And hence God's people are often surprised by the approach of death. It is lamentably true, that they become so much engrossed with the cares of the world, and are so beguiled by the “deceitfulness of riches, and the lust of other things” that the Son of Man is knocking at the door when they least expect him. My brethren, if we would live in readiness to die, we must live near to God. No one is startled by death who has made the cross his refuge, and who never leaves his refuge. It is when we forsake our place of security, and death, like a cunning enemy, comes between the soul and the cross, that dismay fills the mind. If we keep habitually so near our stronghold that upon the first signal of danger we step into it, we shall never be seriously alarmed. But if we wander from it, and permit ourselves to become absorbed in other things, we may find it difficult to return. Jesus will not forsake his chosen, nor leave them to perish, but when they pursue paths which lead from him, they plant thorns to pierce their hearts with many sorrows. If we would meet the last enemy undismayed, we must meet him under the banner of the “Prince of peace.” Our security is where David found his ‘under the shadow of the Almighty,’ Ps. 91:1. Then when death shall come, it will not be the stern executioner of a sentence long delayed but sure, as the messenger which our Father sends to conduct us to his presence that we may be crowned with life everlasting.

Let me mention, *II, Some reasons why we should give heed to the warning of the text.*

1. Great interests are involved in it.

The eternal condition of the soul depends upon the attention which we give to what the Saviour has said. If we listen and obey, all that the most capacious desire can wish, all that immortality can aspire to, shall be gratified and infinitely more, for “eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love him,” 1 Cor.: 2.9. If we neglect the admonition we not only lose the offered good, but we shall surely suffer the threatened evil—as we sow, so

shall we reap. "He that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the spirit shall of the spirit reap life everlasting"—Gal. 6.8. To an unperverted mind it would at once present itself as a duty to the soul to prepare for that future state to which we are all going.

It is not a matter of choice whether you will go there or not. Your only choice is, what that state shall be. You may be there before the sun shall set. That you cannot control. It is God's prerogative to appoint the time, and the means of our departure hence, but is it not a matter of the first importance that you be ready for that change? Is it not a duty which you owe to your own mortality to do what God requires for its well being? True, you cannot save your own soul and God does not ask this of you, but he commands you to repent; to forsake your sins, to believe in his only begotten son, and he pledges his grace as all sufficient for your requirements.

You will not deny that it is a man's duty to provide for his body, though that body cannot live very long. You must feed and clothe, and shelter it, and use your best judgment for the preservation of its health, and I suppose you will admit that the man is criminal who fails to do these things. Yet that body is destined to the grave. In a few years at best—perhaps in a very few days, or hours it may be—it will require neither food nor raiment; still you can care for it, and do wisely. But here is the soul that can never die, and will you tell me that it is not your most solemn duty to make provision for that? If you are not a Christian, you tell me so every day; and what is still worse, you say to God, the author of both, that you will tenderly care for the body, you will gratify its appetites, you will indulge its tastes, you will cherish and caress it; but as for the soul, it must take care of itself. Strange inconsistency, wonderful delusion, fatal infatuation with the world. You will find your neglect to be folly, your indifference to be the forerunner of endless woe.

I might speak of the duty which you owe to others, the influence that you exert, and the part which you play in controlling their conduct, and thus affecting their eternal destiny; and for which you will be held responsible by the Judge of all the earth. I only allude to it and pass on.

There is a higher duty than either of which I have spoken, and embraced in it, a purer motive—your duty to God, to love, to serve, to reverence and obey him. You can show no brighter honor to him; you can offer no more acceptable service upon earth than by preparing to dwell with him in eternity. Your Master, your Benefactor, your Redeemer, He has done you nothing but good all the days of your life, and though ill-requited, the door of mercy is open still, and still the voice of heavenly love invites you to enter, and be blessed forever. You would not dishonor your father, you would not slight your mother, yet you do both to one who is more than father and mother, and all other beings combined, who has borne

with your faults, and loved you so tenderly that to save you from the horrors of the second death he gave his well beloved son a ransom for your soul.

2. You know not at what moment your Lord may come.

The fact that he will come is not doubted by the most sceptical. When he will appear is unknown—it is his secret. For each one the hour and the manner of his death are determined. At any moment we may find ourselves confronting the last enemy. We walk in peril every hour, and know not that hand upon the dial may not now point to that which shall close your history, or mine. "Surely, every man walketh in a vain show." There may be an appearance of security, and often is, at the instant the fatal blow is struck. There are times and seasons for all things else, but death is restricted to to none.

"Leaves have their time to fall,  
And flowers to wither at the North wind's breath:  
And stars to set: but all,  
Thou hast all seasons for thine own, oh Death."

How frequently, and how sadly are we taught the truthfulness of the text: "in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh." And especially of late how have the illustrations of the uncertainty of life been multiplied in our community, and in our church. But a few days ago this bell rung out, in doleful tones the solemn news that another "goeth to his long home"—not the infirm, the aged, but the young, with the flush of early manhood on his cheek, and before the hopes of youth had passed the vanity of life: He went out from us buoyant and hopeful, with a noble ambition stirring the blood in his young heart. He came back here soon, only to occupy his narrow house among your dead. You understand my allusion to our dear young brother Sumner—whose face is so familiar in this house, and whose earnest countenance as he listened to the word of God, I can never forget. It was not my privilege to be with you at his burial, but I must take this occasion to bear my testimony to his consistent walk as a christian, and his worth as a young man, than whom none gave promise of greater usefulness in the church, and in the world.

James C. Sumner, son of Rev. M. T. and Mrs. G. S. Sumner, was born at Wilmington, Fluvanna county, Va., September 24, 1840—and died at Charleston, Tenn., August 25, 1862. He spent a year at Richmond College, Va., and in 1858 removed to this place and engaged in teaching, in which he was unusually successful. A diligent student, he was laying a broad foundation for future usefulness, when this cruel war commenced, and in common with the sentiment of the times, he felt that it was his duty to lay aside the plans which he had marked out for himself, and give his services to the country. He joined the 41st Regiment Alabama Volunteers, commanded by our fellow-townsmen and brother Col. Talbird, and by his fidelity, intelligence and kindness of heart soon won the confi-



dence and affection of his officers and fellow-soldiers. Though he fell not upon the battle-field, he was not less truly a martyr to liberty.

He made a profession of religion early in life, and kept it through that critical period from youth to manhood, as a sacred thing. Modest and retiring in his disposition and deportment, he would not shrink from any duty. With manly firmness he combined the gentleness of a child. In connection with his death, I will give you the simple, touching, stirring narrative of the lady at whose house he 'breathed his life out,' as embodied in the following letter to his mother:

CHARLESTON, TENN., August 26th, 1862.

MRS. SUMNER—Dear Lady: At the request of my mother, I take my pen to tell you how the Death Angel shadowed our home with his dark wing.

The 41st Alabama Regiment came here something near three or four weeks ago. I am happy to say they met with friends at every point as soon as they landed. Quite a number in the regiment were sick, and the number daily increased. Some eight in number were brought to my father's house, among them your son. My mother visited them regularly three or four times a day, and when your son first saw my mother, he said to her, "you must be my mother now," and she told him that she would. He seemed to love her so much after that and would often have her called back to his side, before she could get down the steps from first leaving him. He was impressed from the first that his illness would be unto death, and the persuasions of his friends, together with the influence of my mother, could not in the least change his mind regarding that. One evening he grew so happy. The river of love in his heart for God overflowed, and his lips gave utterance to only the most beautiful and purest of words. He said he would die but death for him had no sting. He had her to get the Bible and open at the 23d Psalm and he repeated every word after my mother as she read it. Then he asked her to read the 14th chapter of St. John, she told him she would, but he must not talk any more otherwise he would exhaust himself. He promised her he would not, and she read it to him. He would occasionally stop her to make some comments, upon verses he particularly liked and tell her what a comfort they had been to him. He asked her if she thought it possible that any one could be so near and so sure of death, and yet feel so little fear. The only thing he said that at all troubled him was that he knew how much father, mother, sisters and brothers had loved him, and they would grieve so. "Tell them," he said, "Mrs. Barrett, that they must not grieve so much for me. It will only be a little while until we meet in Heaven. I go but a short time before them to the Mansion not made with hands. I have a sister, he went on to say, "who was the instrument through God in bringing me to Christ. How I love that sister no one can tell—no one can express—I love her better than any one on earth." Ah! true sister, is it not a good thought to your heart that when you, too, shall have crossed the mystic river and entered the pearly gate, that Jesus shall say, as he places the starry crown upon your brow and points to the brightest star, "Thy brother's soul, my child." It seems to me I would willingly suffer every anguish earth can inflict, to only know, I had won a single soul to Heaven. He said "there are some of my father's household who have not known Christ, tell them to meet me in Heaven—I long to meet them there—to know them in the home beyond the sick; and again, he said "tell the Pastor of my church I want him, the first Sabbath after he hears that I am dead, to tell to all from the pulpit, how I died, and that old Sabbath school friends are not forgotten" and tell them to live closer to Christ. He said "tell my Pastor that death had no shadow of a fear for me. I felt I was going straight home;" all the evening

long he talked in the same beautiful way. The last two or three days before he died he was delirious almost all the time, and often called the names of Sabbath school teacher and home loved ones. He knew my mother the evening before he died, for she placed some soup to his lips, and said drink some of this Jimmie, and he looked up in her face and smiled, then she said do you know me? and he replied "yes; you are Dr. Barrett." His mind was not perfectly clear, else; he would not have replied so, yet still it shows he knew her. Believe me, dear lady, we did all in our power to alleviate his sufferings, I would not have you to think he suffered for attention. We of our little village have too many dear ones far from home to close our hearts against stranger soldiers, especially, when we find them kind, and noble and good. His fellow soldiers were to see him all though the days and nights, and I have seen many tears coursing down bronzed cheeks, and filling eyes that looked unused to weeping, as they watched his suffering and listened to his incoherent words. He died at two o'clock in the morning, while the holy stars were shining, his soul took the "one step into the darkness—then God's eternal day."

Dear lady may God—He who was the "pillar of cloud" by day and pillar of fire" by night to wandering Israel—be ever to you and family a guide and protector. In every time of weakness, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. In every time of trouble, may Jesus be your friend.

"Mother of on angel" may God bless you ever and forever.

Your stranger friend,

MARY L. BARRETT.

Oh! you who leave no hope in Jesus, tell me, could you meet death thus?

He had laid to heart the words from which I have spoken to you, and when the Master came, he was ready. How much shall we miss him in the house of prayer, in the Sabbath school, in his own school and in social life. It is sad to lose one, so lovely and so promising, but Jesus knows best where to place his children, and should we murmur because he has taken him higher, and nearer to his own person? Rather let us rejoice in his promotion to glories, which we, through older, are not permitted to behold. He has finished his course. His sun has gone down while it was yet day." Let us thank God for the brightness of its setting, and pray that our end may be like his, triumphant through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.